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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4775  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#) [ELECTIONS](#)

SUBJECT: BEMBA MEDIA IS BACK AND ALREADY SANCTIONED BY HAM

REF: A. KINSHASA 1208

[1](#)B. KINSHASA 1401

[1](#)1. (U) Summary. One day after recommencing their broadcast operations, two television stations owned by Congolese Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba were sanctioned by the High Media Authority (HAM) for violating the media code of conduct. The two stations had broadcast scenes from Bemba's political rally on July 27 that had resulted in looting and police deaths in Kinshasa. One government-controlled station was also reprimanded for a lack of professional ethics during one of its programs. We plan to meet soon with HAM President Mutinga to try to shore up support for his institutions. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) HAM President Modeste Mutinga announced September 12 that the HAM sanctioned two national television stations for broadcasting programming in violation of the media code of conduct. Canal Kin TV, owned by Vice President and presidential candidate Bemba, was fined USD 10,000 for showing images September 11 of the July 27 political rally Bemba held at a local sports stadium in Kinshasa. Following that speech, members and other sympathizers of his MLC party looted and pillaged several buildings, including the headquarters of the HAM, resulting in the deaths of at least three police officers (ref A).

[1](#)3. (U) Mutinga said the broadcast was in violation of the DRC's electoral law, which stipulates that no campaign-related images may be shown outside the political campaign periods. (Note: The official campaign for the second-round presidential election will likely begin no earlier than September 28. End note.) Canal Kin TV officials were given 48 hours to pay the fine or face the possibility of being shut down. He likewise criticized the programming director of CCTV, another Bemba-owned station, for broadcasting similar images.

[1](#)4. (U) Both stations had resumed broadcasting September 11 after having their signals restored by the Ministry of Information. The Ministry, which is controlled by a member of President Joseph Kabila's PPRD party, took the two stations off the air August 20 at the beginning of the fighting which erupted in the capital between Bemba's and Kabila's forces. The delay in restoring the signals had been a stumbling block in the negotiations between representatives of Bemba and Kabila in the Mixed Commission established in the wake of the August 20-22 violence.

[1](#)5. (U) The HAM also issued a warning to governmental-controlled (and pro-Kabila) RTNC for a September

8 program in which one of the participants used the names of animals to describe certain political actors. The HAM's ethics subcommittee censured the host of the program for not following the professional code of ethics, as well as RTNC's political director for insufficient training of the show's production staff.

¶16. (U) Mutinaga further deplored the fact that three Kinshasa stations -- RLTV, RMTV and Moliere TV -- remained off the air because their signals had also been cut. He called upon the Ministry of Information to turn them back on.

¶17. (U) In presenting his decision, Mutinga approved the agreement signed by representatives of Kabila and Bemba regulating media campaign coverage (ref B), and urged all media outlets to strive for objectivity and impartiality. Mutinga promised that in the future the HAM will react swiftly to any violations of the code of conduct.

¶18. (SBU) Comment: It certainly would have been wiser for Bemba and his media, so early after its resurrection, to avoid a run-in with the HAM. While the high road still eludes the Vice President, we do note that the offense sanctioned by the HAM was more one of anticipating the campaign calendar, rather than one of hateful provocation. We are concerned, however, that the HAM dilutes its message by bending over backward to be even-handed, as in pairing a sanction against Bemba with a reprimand against a pro-Kabila station in the same pronouncement. The Ambassador will meet soon with HAM President Mutinga to raise this point, as well as discuss ways we might help bolster its authority in keeping the lid on extreme rhetoric during this sensitive period. End comment.  
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